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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

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ACCEPTANCE OF MANUFACTURED HOUSING IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES IN ATLANTIC CANADA

BACKGROUND

First Nations are growing population groups that experience a disproportionate share of housing-related challenges and can benefit from an increased number of affordable and quality housing options. The aim of this project was to identify barriers to, and opportunities for, economic and social development that can be derived from the broader adoption of manufactured housing on First Nations reserves in Atlantic Canada.

The study explores provision of manufactured housing as one of the approaches to addressing housing needs on First Nations reserves in Atlantic Canada by identifying:

- challenges to greater acceptance of manufactured housing;
- potential strategies to overcome these challenges; and
- economic and social development benefits that may be derived from manufactured housing.

METHODOLOGY

Study goals were achieved by undertaking several steps, including:

- provision of relevant and practical information to help First Nations representatives identify the pros and cons of manufactured housing for their particular communities;
- facilitation of a collective forum and exchange of opinions and ideas between First Nations and manufactured housing industry representatives in the Atlantic Region;
- establishment of a reference base for potential comparison among First Nations communities and researchers in this region and across Canada.

Specifically, this was achieved through:

- project planning;
- meetings, interviews and contextual information collection;
- manufactured housing product demonstrations and plant tours;

- follow-up and stakeholder consultations; and
- preparation of a research report.

A participatory approach to the research was taken in order to collect qualitative data and encourage joint learning and increased communication among stakeholders. It included consultations with the project participants and informants, periodic validation of information acquired, and refinement of inquiry tools. The main sources of primary data were meetings with manufactured housing sector representatives and in-depth interviews with representatives of First Nations communities in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Informant feedback was received on particular aspects of manufactured homes, including:

- cost
- design
- technical performance
- installation and building material quality control
- service and warranties
- relative depreciation
- operating costs

First Nations community and manufactured housing industry representatives shared valuable suggestions toward potential action steps to be taken in order to turn manufactured housing into a more competitive housing alternative on First Nations reserves in Atlantic Canada.



FINDINGS

The findings provide insight into general characteristics of manufactured homes on First Nations reserves in Atlantic Canada including their relative share in the overall housing stock, their age and condition. Over the last 20 years, First Nations communities in Atlantic Canada experienced a marked increase in numbers of manufactured homes. Of course, the numbers, age and condition of manufactured homes vary from one community to another. Overall, the share of manufactured homes on reserves is around 10 per cent of all housing. This represents approximately half of the estimated share (about 20 per cent) of manufactured housing in the Atlantic region's non-Aboriginal communities.

Attitudes toward manufactured housing vary among individuals/families in the same community and from one First Nations community to another. The reputation of manufactured housing among First Nations community leaders is closely related both to previous experience with manufactured housing products and to the potential of manufactured housing to encourage community economic development.

Respondents agreed that they would embrace manufactured housing more fully if the communities themselves could benefit more from the housing production itself.

Informants suggested steps be taken to:

- facilitate information provision and consumer education;
- support the manufactured housing industry education efforts on housing-related issues of First Nations populations;
- strengthen First Nations capacity to implement their own housing policies, programs and plans;
- involve First Nations communities and their membership in the production aspect of manufactured housing;
- promote First Nations homeowners' efforts to care for their homes by introducing and supporting an education program focusing on manufactured home maintenance and repairs;
- make manufactured housing more competitive in the First Nations context;
- create First Nations manufactured housing industry business interaction and conflict resolution mechanisms. This would foster greater transaction transparency and closer communication between First Nations representatives (including political and housing professionals), manufactured housing producers, suppliers and retailers.

CONCLUSION

By bringing together Atlantic region representatives of First Nations communities and the manufactured housing industry, a better understanding was fostered of the perceptions, needs and opportunities. This could be useful to First Nations, the manufactured housing industry, and program providers in improving housing access and supply to First Nations communities.

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